

On The Academia Argentina De Turismo (Argentine Academy for Tourism)

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Abstract

The present short essay review explores the limitations and challenges will face the Academia Argentina de Turismo (AAT) in the next years, in order to situate tourism as a serious discipline within Argentina and Latin America too. Basically, this discussion tilts at highlighting the limitation this Organ shows in the ways new members are recruited. To our end, we feel this academy is doomed to repeat the same caveats of IAST (International Academy for the Study of Tourism) already discussed by Tribe in earlier approaches. Integrated into majority by marketing experts, this new organ is oriented to tourism-maintenance instead of responding to what tourism is.

Key Words: Epistemology of Tourism, Academies, Tourism, Academia Argentina de Turismo

Good news for tourism-researchers! or at the best for tourism-researchers in Argentina. The first days of November 2013 bore witness of the formation of the first collegiate corpus which was baptized as *La Academia Argentina de Turismo – in English Argentine Academy of tourism*. Although I must confess, I bet this project will not prosper, the time showed I was wrong. The brand new academic organ was baptized as “*Academia Argentina de Turismo*” (*AAT-Argentine Academy of tourism*). While originally this academy was oriented to stimulate the academic debate about the nature of tourism in Argentina, as well as the potentialities to be consolidated as a scientific-option, the founders are well-known experts in Marketing and Management. This suggests an additional problem since they enthusiastically embraced “the economic-centered paradigm” ignoring other positions and voices. From its inception, the economic-based theory is not aimed at studying tourism to understand its essential nature but it is limited -as a piece of engineering- to locate and eradicate the material anomalies that may very well place the tourist destination in jeopardy. Instead of discussing the nature and historical evolution of tourism -as a rite of passage-, they preferably raise the question what should we do making tourism a more profitable industry. The former signals to a “scientific-centered position” while the latter refers to the constellations of policy-makers. To some extent, some voices have alerted recently how the hegemony of the material paradigm in tourism has led to an

inevitable -if not irreversible- fragmentation in the produced knowledge. In critical dialogue with International Academy for the Study of Tourism (IAST), John Tribe laments the passive role of this academy not only in leading the methodological programs to avoid the fragmentation of knowledge but called the attention about the lack of a clear method for field-working. After all, the indiscipline of tourism can be understood as the lack of dominant paradigm that explains tourism fixing the agenda towards a specific-defined epistemology. Today's scholars adopt not only their own paradigms but also are indifferent on the role of their academy in the study of tourism. As Tribe puts it, the indiscipline of tourism invariably resulted in the stalemate of tourism research in spite of the volume of published works. The lack of a clearly-defined paradigm ushered professional researchers in academic anarchy delaying the opportunity for the discipline to become in a scientific option (Tribe, 1997; 2006; 2010). In earlier approaches, we delineated the contours of a new debate, explaining how the indiscipline of tourism is given by two (combined) factors. On one hand, tourism emerged in a context where all epistemologies and all-encompassing models are in crisis. The introduction of methodological relativism prompted post 70s decade, not only produced a crisis in the concept of reality but also adjusted reality to what people feel or perceive. Since tourism surfaced in this context of disorder, no clear epistemology has indeed consented. On another hand, tourism academy is more interested in administering destinations than in deepening other methodological forms. This coincides with the economic-based paradigm which focuses in the application of open or closed-end questionnaires to know furtherly what tourists think than in understanding the nature of the social behaviour. Under some conditions, these methodologies obscure more than they clarify; simply because sometimes interviewees lie to protect their interests or are unfamiliar with their innermost feelings and emotions. (Thirkettle & Korstanje, 2013; Korstanje & George, 2015; Korstanje, Mustelier & Herrera, 2016). Another additional problem of the IAST seems to be the Anglo-philosophy their members hold. As Graham Dann brilliantly observed, by adopting English as the only language for the study of tourism and the Academy leads towards subtle ethnocentrism. Not only those who do not speak English with fluency are systematically relegated but also the Academy has few non-English native speakers. In this respect, Dann argues convincingly that thinking tourism research in the horizon of English as lingua franca implies the discrimination of many other voices and forms of knowledge. Going farther, Dann interrogates himself to what extent IAST may be defined as a democratic institution -constraining the participation of their members to countries such as England, the US and Australia (Dann, 2009; 2011). The seminal paper of Dann is pertinent in this discussion in view of two main reasons. Firstly, English has monopolized not only the content of the published works at the top-tiered

journals, as well as the academic legacy of the IAST but secondly and most important, his observations describe the errors the AAT should avoid. The question of whether the youth Argentine Academy will or not repeat the same mistakes than IAST seems to be very hard to grasp. What is important is to note AAT is mainly supported by politicians who manipulate tourism as an ideological platform to legitimate their administrations. Tourism is, for politicians and policymakers- a vehicle towards development.

As the previous argument given, it is important not to lose the sight of the fact that on its onset, the academy aimed at legitimating the labour of policymakers on the hands of Don Antonio Torrejon (a recently honorary Ph D laureate in tourism) who worked hard to promote tourism jointly the National Ministry of Tourism. Needless to say, beyond the clout of the economic-paradigm, this valuable project envisions the same vicious of origin which repeats the experience of IAST. This short essay review is not an attack to this academy formed by distinguished professors who have dedicated their life to tourism-research but highlights its main limitations to unite a shared-epistemology that consolidate tourism as a serious object of study.

At a first look, La Academia Argentina de Turismo (AAT) devoted its efforts and resources to meet the needs and hopes of many voices, who claimed for the unification of a collegiate organ to protect the interests of practitioners, scholars, businessmen of the tourism industry. Emulating the examples in other nations, the academy looked to posit a new debate revolving around the current problems of tourism industry in an ever-competitive world. In this token, it is remarkable that creativity and innovation are fertile grounds to reinvigorate the national policies that help in the promotion of tourism Argentina-wide. At a first glimpse, the creation of the Academy associates to management-related issues about destinations instead of investigating in the nature of tourism. Not surprisingly, AAT continues the same steps of IAST whose credibility was undermined by the tactics followed to recruit new members. Instead of validating the skills, credential and merits of new members on the basis of their achievements, IAST added new members based on trajectory or traditional purposes. As a medieval institution, IAST allowed each member has the opportunity to nominate a candidate at its discretion. Once done, the application is validated by the Academy. The committee is formed not only by faculty members -who are already established scholars- but also it is determined by the same faculty members took direct intervention in the process of selection. In perspective, candidates are selected by their friendship with existent members instead of real merits. The problem is not there but in the nomination process. This method, needless to say, is not limited to IAST, since it is still being used in other academies as well, but paves the pathways for the rise of an “academic aristocracy”, whose members are not

chosen by current merits, but the recommendation of other members. This forms a consolidated but closed Academy creating a rupture with the rest professional researchers. The polemic revived in view of these methods of selection AAT follows seems to be associated to create a closed collegiate elite which does not dialogue with the rest of academicians. While the acceptance of a new member in the academy should be a recognition of trajectory, integrity and performance, no less true is faculty members should be excluded from the process of selection and recruitment. To put the same in other terms, in the selection of candidates for Nobel Prize the task is not limited to faculty members, but to countless universities which often pipeline the candidacies to be strictly scrutinized by an external committee which is convoked for the occasion.

Not only IAST but AAT show endogenous channels for the nomination, which may very well lead to “nepotism” affecting the credibility of the institution, as well as the produced knowledge -without mentioning the dialogue with other networks. This begs a more than interesting question, why has psychoanalysis consolidated as a matured discipline in 10 years while tourism takes almost four decades?

Let’s remind readers that Freud not only provided with an all-encompassing model for the study of Id but cemented a specific epistemology which strictly accompanied the discipline for decades. Today, despite the volume of published books, papers and proceedings, tourism-researchers are unable to define what tourism is. In one of my international conferences, a colleague told me Argentina will be creating the new Academy for the study of Tourism, so the question was, do you think they will be helpful for academic research?.

After several seconds in silence, I sincerely responded I do not know, hopefully, they can do it, but I am afraid that unless AAT works hard to discard the economic-centered paradigm they will surely fail. Furthermore, the question whether relativism eroded by the epistemological basis of Enlightenment, a philosophical movement which postulated a pervading view of reality, the emergent disciplines after 80s decade, as journalism, tourism, even management have serious limitations to form a unified epistemology. This not only represents the main challenge for AAT in the decades to come but also from tourism as well. As above stated, an additional problem seems to be the economic-oriented conception (as the dominant ideology) about tourism the founding members of AAT as Antonio Torrejon or Juan Carlos Chervatin developed. It is impossible to imagine the American Academy of History concerned by the future of museums in the US. To a closer look, Academy’s goals are intended to study history while the preservation of relics and Museums is a priority for the state. AAT is obsessed by issues which very well

fall in the scope of Ministry of Tourism. I feel, after years as a fieldworker, this was the original sin of IAST and I fervently hope AAT does not repeat the same errors in the not-so-distant future.

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